Running (Please Don't Bury Us) by bulletsandbutterflies (turningpages)

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Summary:

Will knew that if he were stronger, he would have dealt with the pain of facing Mike and El with a smile on his face. But he had always been a coward. He had run from the Demogorgon, he had run from the Shadow Monster. And now, he was running from Mike.

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Author's Note:

> The characters are 16 for the bits in the present tense. I started shipping Byler recently and just felt the urge to write something.
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> Title is taken from the song "Runnin' (Lose it All)' by Naughty Boy ft. Beyonce. If you haven't heard this song before, I definitely recommend!

“It gets easier, you know,” he hears Dustin say. The Wheeler-Sinclair-Henderson-Byers-Hopper crew (plus Max and Steve) are having their annual end of school cookout, and Will had moved away from the group to steal some moments of peace and quiet. He continues sketching the last few details of the Wheeler’s backyard as he counters, “What gets easier?”

“Pining,” Dustin replies, and Will can’t help but drop his charcoal pen in shock, whipping his head up to see a small - but knowing - smile plastered on Dustin’s face.

“I don’t know what you’re talking about,” he says warily, watching Dustin’s smile grow wider until his perfectly straight teeth (and *God*, it took forever for Dustin to stop purring at every person that commented on his lack of braces) were showing.

“We both know you know what we’re talking about,” Dustin insists, turning to look pointedly at Mike and Eleven - they did try calling her Jane for awhile, but the name just wouldn’t stick - who are huddled together under the elm tree. Will can see their fingers laced together, and he forces himself to ignore the sudden ache he feels in his chest.

When Will found out that the renowned Eleven was back, he knew his relationship with Mike was going to change. He had seen how heartbroken Mike looked every time the girl was mentioned, but he wasn’t entirely ready for the pain he felt every time he saw them together. It hit him hard and fast during the Snow Ball, when he

watched Mike lean down to press a kiss on El's lips.

"I'm not-"

"You don't have to deny it with me," Dustin cuts him off with a sideway glance. "I've always known you had a thing for your Mikey."

"He's not my Mikey," Will argues. *Not anymore*, he adds silently, although he's starting to wonder if he ever had Mike at all. He sighs in defeat and absent-mindedly resumes his drawing. "Anyways, it doesn't matter. Mike is happy with Eleven, and even if he were single, he wouldn't look twice at me. Mike's-" and he struggles to say the next word because even if Dustin isn't freaking out at the fact that Will likes boys, he's still coming to terms with it himself. So he settles instead with,"Mike's not like me."

"I don't know," Dustin muses, and Will is so close to telling him to shut up. To just leave him alone in his misery. He's learned it's so much better to let go, instead of clinging on to false hope. "You should've seen him when we thought you were dead. And during that Mind Flayer phase, he stayed by you the whole ti-"

"Because El was missing!" Will snaps, clenching his hand so hard that he breaks his pencil in two. He throws the stationary away in frustration and covers his face with his hands. *God, he's a mess*, and part of him wishes Dustin will realise that he's a lost cause and leave him. But it's not long before he feels Dustin's arm around his shoulders.

"Hey buddy, it's okay," Dustin says softly, and for one selfish, terrible moment, Will wishes it isn't Dustin holding him. "Like I said, it gets easier. You knew what I was like after Lucas and Max got together. But look at me now!"

And Will knows he's right. After his baby fat had melted away and he grew a few inches, Dustin was having no problem charming every girl in Hawkins High (even Jennifer Hayes).

"It's different, Dustin," Will whispers, lifting his head to furtively wipe the tear rolling down his cheek. "I don't know if I'll ever get over it."

“Trust me,” Dustin pats his back gently. “You’ll get through this. Mike’s not everything.”

Will nods half-heartedly as he stares morosely at his sketch. Underneath the tree, he’s drawn himself and Mike, his head on Mike’s chest, their hands wound together. *You’re wrong*, he thinks. *He’s always been my everything.*

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It was difficult at first. And it still is. But Will has learned how to cope with it. The way he figured out how to cope with the nightmares that came after his encounter with the Upside Down and its monstrosities (most of the time, he would stay up sketching until he was too tired to keep his eyes open). Besides, it was wrong to be so jealous of your own sister, which is what El is to him ever since his mom had said “I do” to Hopper two summers ago.

At first, he forced himself to go to every hangout. He’d look away every time Mike pulled El close or pretend he didn’t see the kisses they’d steal when they thought no one was looking. He’d come home to a sympathetic Joyce or Jonathan (because he didn’t even had to tell them how he felt. They knew him too well not to see his longing looks whenever Mike was around) who would then envelop him in a hug and offer to make him his favourite dinner or listen to a mix tape, depending on who found him.

But after awhile, it became too much to handle. He started making up excuses to not meet up when he knew Mike and El would be there together (“Mom needs me to do some chores, guys, and you know I can never say no to her.”) and every time Mike came over to his house, Will would find any reason to not be around.

Mike confronted him about it once, cornering him in the boy’s bathroom at school of all places (Will was grateful that no one came barging in to find them awkwardly staring each other down). “You’ve been so distant,” he accused, looking at Will morosely with his dark brown eyes that had always made Will’s breath catch in his chest. “I mean, you’re always saying no to a sleepover. Did I do something wrong?”

“I’ve just been tired,” Will had lied, focusing on a crack in the wall because he couldn’t bear to stare into those sad eyes any longer. “I promise I’ll come to the next one.”

He tried to slip away from Mike but found himself stopped by a hand on his arm, pulling him back. He looked up to see such intense emotions in Mike’s face that he forgot to struggle against his grip.

“I know something’s wrong, Will,” Mike started, tightening his hand around Will’s arm a fraction. “We used to be so close. What happened?”

“Nothing happened,” Will assured him, giving him what he hoped was a bright smile. “And we’re still close, Mikey. You’re still my best friend.”

Mike had let him go reluctantly after that, and the topic was never brought up again. Will knew that if he were stronger, he would have dealt with the pain of facing Mike and El with a smile on his face. But he had always been a coward. He had run from the Demogorgon, he had run from the Shadow Monster. And now, he was running from Mike.

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He goes away for camp a few days after that cookout. He wasn’t expecting to have as much as he did, and he comes home feeling different. His mom refused to let him go the first day he arrived home, and he spent the whole night with his whole family (a rare occurrence since Jonathan left for university) eating a variety of home-cooked meals that Will had secretly missed.

But tonight, he’s promised to meet up with the gang. They’re all sleeping over at Mike’s (well everyone minus the girls) and for once in a long time, he feels excited to see his friends. He’s missed them all, and after being away for four weeks, he really believes he could handle the *I’m-in-love-with-my-best-friend-who’s-dating-my-sister* situation better.

He is proven wrong as soon as he sees Mike running towards him the moment he reaches the Wheeler’s house. Mike has grown even taller

(is it even possible to grow so much in a month?), probably hitting close to 6'1 now, and he notices that Mike can no longer be classified as lanky. Lean would be a more fitting description, Will thinks, when he feels Mike's muscles around him as he's enveloped into a bear hug.

"You're not allowed to leave me again for that long, you hear me?" Mike breathes out, and Will can't help but let his head rest in the crook of Mike's neck for a few heartbeats (God, why does it feel like they fit perfectly together?) before pulling away, cheeks heating up with embarrassment. But if Mike had noticed Will leaning into the embrace a little too much, he doesn't say anything.

They head inside where Will is promptly tackled by Dustin and Lucas, who have also - to Will's dismay, as he's still only shy of 5'7 - grown a lot taller.

"Like your new hairstyle," Lucas points out to Will after he manages to extricate himself from their heavy limbs. "Don't you think Will looks nice with that haircut, Mike?"

"Uh, y-yeah, of course," Mike stammers out, and Will has to stop himself from grinning as to not be too obvious. Unfortunately, he catches Dustin's eyes and blushes when Dustin waggles his eyebrows.

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"Aright, I'm heading out," Lucas declares later that night, and Dustin chimes in with a, "Me too!"

"Wait, aren't we all sleeping over?" Will asks, scrambling to stand with his other friends.

"Oh yeah, I told Mike I had to cancel the sleepover this morning," Lucas replies with a shrug, but he doesn't quite meet Will's eyes. "I guess I forgot to tell you."

"Same here," Dustin nods, a bit too eagerly for Will's liking. He glares at him, but Dustin just grins back in an infuriating way. "I promised Mom I'd look after her beloved cat while she's away."

Before Will can think of a response, both boys are leaving Mike's

room, shouting their goodbyes as they leave. He turns around to see Mike looking at him nervously, and he gives himself a second to panic about being alone with Mike in such close quarters before asking, “Should I just head back too?”

“Stay with me,” Mike says, and Will can see his hand trembling slightly as he pulls Will down to sit on his bed with him. They scoot over to rest their backs on the headboard, and Mike is sitting so close to him that Will can feel Mike’s warmth radiating off him. “It’s been so long since we’ve hung out. Just the two of us.”

“I’m sorry." Will genuinely hates himself for the distance he’s put between himself and Mike these past few years. “I’ve been kinda distracted.”

Mike is silent for a while, and Will is ready to beg Mike for his forgiveness when he says, “As long as you’re okay.” He takes Will’s hand in his and adds, “As long as we’re okay.”

“We’re definitely okay, I pro-.”

“There's something I need to tell you,” Mike blurts out quickly, and Will’s mind begins to think of all the awful things that Mike might say next (*I have an incurable disease and I have 6 months left to live* or *Troy and I have made friends while you were gone and he's totally right about you* or *I know you’re in love with me* and *I think you're disgusting* and *I don’t want to see you ever again*) until he hears Mike murmur, “Will, hey. Come back to me.”

His mind stops whirring, and he focuses his attention on Mike, who’s smiling shyly at him. “Where did you go then?”

“Nowhere important,” Will smiles tentatively. “What were you going to tell me?”

Will can see Mike hesitating, but before he can tell Mike that it’s okay, Mike says, “El and I broke up.”

“What?”

“We broke up,” Mike repeats, picking at the seams of his jacket.

“But, you guys have been together for almost 3 years now!” Will exclaims, and he’s surprised at himself for trying to defend their relationship when all this time it has caused him more heartache than it should. “What happened?”

“We just realised we both wanted something else, and our relationship wasn’t it.”

There’s another bout of silence, and Will squirms uncomfortably, thinking of something appropriately comforting to say to his friend. But finding himself unable to conjure up anything else he settles on a pathetic, “I’m so sorry, Mike.”

“It’s fine, honestly,” Mike waves him off. “I still love El, and she loves me, but it’s been a while since I’ve loved her as more than a friend. And she felt the same way too.”

“Then, why did you guys stay together for so long?”

“I guess we were just comfortable with the relationship,” Mike shrugs, and then he pauses for a few seconds before he says, “And I was in denial about what I really wanted. Who I really wanted to be with.”

“Oh,” Will utters, trying not to sound too disappointed. “Who is it?”

But instead of answering his question, Mike says, “Will, I need you to tell me why you’ve never talked about liking anyone.”

Will swallows heavily, trying hard not to fidget. "I don't know what that's got to do with anything."

"Just tell me," Mike says quietly. "Please."

“I’ve never been interested in anyone,” Will replies almost frantically, and he's hoping he hasn't been too obvious. Mike is heading dangerously close to a conversation Will never wanted to have. He can feel his fight-or-flight instinct kicking in, and it's screaming at him to flee. “Look, Mike, I’m kinda tired can we just-“

“I love you,” Mike whispers, and Will thinks for a moment that the Shadow Monster or the Gormogon has finally got him. That he’s

finally dead and for some unknown reason was good enough to have ended up in heaven where Mike Wheeler is telling him that he loves him. “I love you, and Dustin and Lucas have been telling me that you love me too." Mike groans, dropping his head into his hands. "God, I hope they haven’t lied to me because if I’ve ruined our friendship over this I’m going to have to kill myself.”

And for once in his life, Will decides to stop running and pulls Mike in for a kiss.

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They talk about everything and nothing that night (in between kisses that Mike can’t seem to get enough of). Mike admits the first time he knew he was in love with Will (“When the Mind Flayer possessed your body, it broke my heart to think that I would never see you again.”) but how he was afraid and unsure to act upon it. Will tells Mike the truth about why he distanced himself from Mike these few years (“God, we should’ve just been honest with ourselves and each other,” Mike chuckles before leaning down to capture Will's lips in a searing kiss) and about Dustin advice to him that day of the cookout.

“You mean when you guys were all huddled up together in the corner?” Mike asks incredulously. “I was so jealous, I thought Dustin was making his moves on you.”

“He was just being a good friend,” Will laughs, and he smiles when Mike pulls him down to lay on his chest (and oh, how wonderful it was to finally hear the *thump thump* of Mike Wheeler’s heart!) and laces their fingers together. “I’ve drawn this once. Us together.”

“You should show me tomorrow,” Mike says, tightening his arms around Will before placing a sleepy kiss on his forehead. “I love you.”

“I love you too,” Will says. *As I have always loved you*, he thinks, just before he falls asleep.

Author's Note:

> Hope you enjoyed that! Comments and questions are definitely welcomed (although please be kind - I

haven't written fics in 3 years now and I wrote this in less than a day!). Thanks for reading :)